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IN GRANDMOTHER'S LAP

by The Spinster Aunt

After last month's excellent article [from Earthrite BBS -- Ed.] on the duties, responsibilities and qualifications of a High Priest/High Priestess, let's talk about those of a teacher.

In the wonderful ideal world, where all women are wise and beautiful, all men strong and sensitive, and all children are uniformly adorable, teachers would all be stable, secure, ethical, reasonable, and open to their students. In those circumstances, they would be fully aware of the powers and drawbacks of their position.

The primary power/drawback is "expert power." Sociologists describe this as the power derived from the powerful one's perceived expertise, knowledge, and understanding, which are superior to and not shared by the one attributing the power. At its worst, this can lead to "white coat syndrome", where experimenters in white coats were able to persuade naive subjects to push a button which supposedly gave a stronger and stronger electric shock to another experimental subject; even after the other subject's voice was heard groaning and pleading for mercy. Not just a horror story--it really happened.

At best, the teacher's expert power leads to a desire on the student's part to develop into another such powerful person, who knows what to do and how to do it, and that desire makes students study hard and really work on their development. But even then, this will induce feelings of admiration and awe in the student which can make him/her easy prey for an unscrupulous instructor -- think of Aleister Crowley.

This leads to two guidelines. For the teacher, don't borrow money from your students unless you're prepared to really sweat to pay it all back. Don't attempt to get sexy with them unless it's a serious, love-affair, honorable situation -- they're really vulnerable to you, and the karma of sexual abuse is heavy stuff. There are bound to be some "taking advantage" situations that aren't, really...many students will want to bake you cakes, help paint your roof, or clean out your garage, and it can improve their self-esteem and give them a lot of good feelings to let them. But by and large, if you wouldn't want to see your little brother or sister doing it for Bhagwan Shree

Rajneesh, don't let your student do it for you.

For the student, you need to be aware that a lot of your feelings of "Gee you're wonderful to know all that" are for the knowledge, not the person. Admiration sex can be a big thrill, but not if you later find out it's a thrill shared by all your fellow students. If you wouldn't do a particular favor for a friend/neighbor/sibling, why would you consider doing it for your teacher? The worst that will happen if you say "No, I don't think I want to do that", is that the teacher will fire you -- and if this person is unwilling to work with you unless you "come across" in some way their ethics may not be what you want to emulate for your, anlf.

It's also necessary to look at the fact that all this can work in reverse. Teachers need their students in order to keep on being teachers. Students also can borrow money/insist on sex/demand favors, and their very vulnerability makes them powerful. The teacher can fall into going along with whatever the students want without noticing it, and thus do a disservice to both him/herself and the student.

Most of these issues never arise between students and teachers in the real world, but the potential is there, and both parties need to be aware and to take responsibility for their own choices. They also need not to judge hastily, and that means saying "Hey, I may have mis-heard you, but I feel like you're trying to ..... and I'm not comfortable with that." Bet you that four times out of five the response will be "No, I wasn't" or "I was, but it's not a big deal, let's drop it.", and you can go on from there. Honesty about feelings is highly recommended, and fosters trust and good feelings in both teachers and students.

Feedback is rewarding, people. Did this article annoy you/enchant you/bore you? Do you have questions, concerns, suggestions, topics you'd like addressed? Please send your comments, etc to Grandmother's Lap c/o R.M.P.J. -- it gets lonely communicating with the void.

Blessed Be,
The Spinster Aunt
.....from RMPJ, Oct. '86